

TESTIMONY REGARDING HB-5037: AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR  
THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2023

Appropriations Committee

February 24, 2022

Presented By: Kathleen Callahan, MSW

Dear Honorable Chairpersons Osten and Walker, Ranking Members Miner and France, Vice Chairs Hartley, Dathan, and Nolan, and all other distinguished Members of the Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Kathleen Callahan, a resident of Stratford, and the co-founder of CSTAR, the Connecticut State Taskforce on ACEs and Resilience. We are a cross-sector collaboration that seeks to raise awareness of the impact of childhood adversity and build resilient communities. I am testifying on behalf of CSTAR regarding the Department of Public Health in the proposed budget, *HB-5037: An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023*.

While no single legislative action can end childhood adversity, CSTAR believes the impact of trauma can be mitigated through system reform that cultivates and builds connections and relationships and provides equitable access to resources and opportunities. Our inaugural legislative priorities include supporting the inclusion of Community Health Workers (CHWs), serving as family navigators, in universal home visiting programs, knowing that this is a necessary piece of system reform.

When I first heard about CHWs, I was reminded of the emergent Credible Messenger movement which is grounded in the belief that transformative resources reside within communities. CHWs are similarly specially trained and can not only improve the health of individual lives, but empower neighborhoods to leverage their existing resources for community wellbeing.

CHWs bridge the gap between communities and health and social service system by building capacity, advocating, providing direct services, promoting wellness by providing culturally appropriate, bidirectional health information, and assist system navigation.<sup>1</sup>

I attended a presentation<sup>2</sup> about universal home visiting and the potential for a pilot program leveraging federal ARP funding. Among all the benefits of CHWs, these

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<sup>1</sup> State of Connecticut. (2017). *OLR Research Report: Community Health Workers*.  
<https://cga.ct.gov/2017/rpt/2017-R-0175.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> State of Connecticut. (2021). *Connecticut American Recovery Plan Act: Investing in Connecticut's Future through Universal Home Visiting*. Retrieved from  
[https://www.cga.ct.gov/ph/med/related/20190101\\_Women%20&%20Childrens%20Health%20Committee/20210712/Office%20of%20Early%20Childhood-%20Home%20Visiting.pdf](https://www.cga.ct.gov/ph/med/related/20190101_Women%20&%20Childrens%20Health%20Committee/20210712/Office%20of%20Early%20Childhood-%20Home%20Visiting.pdf)

phrases stood out: “continuum of care,” “tailored care coordination services,” and “uniquely qualified to work with vulnerable and high-risk populations.” As a social worker, these resonated with me. I wasn’t surprised that research bears out their importance with improved patient experiences, care coordination, clinical outcomes, and lower costs.

Sadly, I was surprised to hear that funding negotiations led to considerable cuts, from the initial request of \$33 million to what is in the current budget proposal, \$3 million.

I have often heard that "social change moves at the speed of relationships." The change to our healthcare system will not be fully realized without the inclusion of CHWs whose inherent trusted relationships with their neighbors will exponentially speed up the process.

We ask the committee to increase the CHW allocation in the proposed budget to provide the funding necessary for review of the certification process, provision of required training to CHWs who have yet been certified, and integration of CHWs into universal home visiting programs.

Admittedly, I have very limited knowledge about the challenges involved in crafting a state budget but I am quite sure your committee often agonizes over approving cuts to necessary services. Community members, working in roles we have yet imagined, will be part of our future and I hope we begin to financially support the work they have done to hold us together for so long.

Thank you for consideration,

Kathleen Callahan  
CSTAR Co-founder  
Stratford, CT